

**CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND
PRESENTATION, REGULAR MEETING AND BUDGET WORKSESSION
OF THE CITY COUNCIL
(Adopted July 11, 2005)**

Monday, May 23, 2005

OFFICIALS PRESENT

Mayor Porter
Councilmember Austin-Lane
Councilmember Barry
Councilmember Elrich
Councilmember Mizeur
Councilmember Seamens
Councilmember Williams

City Manager Matthews
Community and Government Liaison Ludlow
Deputy City Manager Hobbs
Acting City Clerk Carpenter
Library Director Arnold-Robbins
Public Works Director Lott
Housing and Community Dev. Director Daines

The Council convened at 7:39 p.m. in the Municipal Building Council Chambers, 7500 Maple Avenue, Takoma Park, MD

Reordering of the Agenda

1. Resolution re: District 20 Legislators

Motion by Councilmember Williams; second by Councilmember Barry, to adopt a resolution honoring District 20 Legislators, Senator Ida G. Ruben, Delegates Peter Franchot, Sheila B. Hixson, and Gareth E. Murray.

Mayor Porter thanked the legislators for the many years they have helped with funding for the Community Center.

Mr. Williams noted the grand opening being planned for the Community Center. He said the City will send information and a formal invitation.

Mr. Barry commented that he would donate an inscribed brick from his family, thanking the legislators for their support of the project.

Mr. Seamens commented that, before the project began, Delegate Franchot came to a PSCAC meeting to given guidance to the community on how to approach a project of this magnitude. He thanked Senator Ruben for her efforts for the city. Mr. Seamens thanked Delegate Hixson for her dedication.

Ms. Austin-Lane thanked the legislators. Since 1998, you've come through time after time. The building is starting to look somewhat finished. Thank you for what you have helped our

community do.

Ms. Mizeur noted that this has become an annual event, thanking the legislators for delivering needed resources. We had high hopes that we would be sitting here again.

Mr. Elrich commented that, hopefully, we can have some success with the gym. I appreciate what you have done, despite the hard times at the State level.

Howard Kohn, Chair of the Citizens Liaison Committee on the Community Center, said on behalf of the Recreation Committee, the Takoma Foundation, and the Citizens Committee, we thank you. It was a group of women on Ritchie Avenue who brought this idea to me many years ago. Peter Franchot's involvement is long standing. I've appreciated and admired that each of you have kept your word in the past few years. It is something to be proud of.

Erwin Mack, Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority, commented on how he's gotten to know the District 20 legislators since the redistricting. It is a formidable delegation. He said he looks forward to cross county cooperation with District 47.

Sabrina Baron, President of Historic Takoma, Inc., said she reiterates and supports everything that has been said, and appreciates the delegation's help to Historic Takoma.

The resolution was adopted (VOTING FOR: Porter, Austin-Lane, Barry, Elrich, Mizeur, Seamens, Williams).

**Resolution 2005-39
(Attached)**

Senator Ruben thanked the Council for all the support over the years. Takoma Park is a special star in our life. It has enhanced our district. Thank you for recognizing us.

Delegate Hixson said she is honored and pleased to be a part of this, with our team. We were at one time criticized for getting money for projects in Montgomery County, because they never used the money. We never had that problem with you. Once the Community Center is up and running, we know it will be full. You should be very proud of your community. Thank you for including us.

Delegate Franchot thanked Mayor Porter personally for her leadership. He said he hopes that continuity of leadership continues. He thanked each of the Councilmembers. Delegate Franchot said it is his 19th year representing the city. He noted that Delegate Hixson is the Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, Senator Ruben is the President Pro Tem of the Senate. I say each year, is there any room on your dance card for Takoma Park. They find a space. That's how we succeed each year. He thanked Howard Kohn and all of the citizens of Takoma Park.

Mayor Porter made a presentation to Peter Franchot, noting that he made a personal commitment

for \$2 million for the Community Center, which has now been fulfilled.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Ms. Austin-Lane commented that she has sought the advice of Nina Seavey, an award-winning documentary film maker, about the Film Festival.

Mr. Seamens noted the recent Police Awards banquet and the Independence Day Committee yard sale.

Mr. Barry recognized the Recreation Department for their work on the Ward 6 block party on Saturday. He also commented on an accident on New Hampshire Avenue, noting that the City needs to ask again for SHA to find the money to repave the road with the special surfacing material which will allow cars not to slide.

Mr. Williams noted the Fire Department Annual Awards Dinner, where three members of the department were recognized for 50 years of service.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES - April 18, 2005 and May 2, 2005

Motion by Williams; second by Seamens, to adopt the minutes of April 18 and May 2, 2005. The minutes were adopted (VOTING FOR: Porter, Austin-Lane, Barry, Mizeur, Seamens, Williams; ABSENT: Elrich).

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Nina Seavey, commented on her involvement with the Takoma Park Film Festival for two of the past three years. She is the founding director and executive producer of the Silver Docs Film Festival. She said the Takoma Park Film Festival is in need of support. We've seen some decline in the ability to develop an audience. It is not an easy thing to mount a film festival. Any amount of support would help. There has been a lack of leadership, but not a lack of enthusiasm. If you hire a director for the festival, we would probably see a resurgence in interest.

PRESENTATION

1. Update on the Community Center Project

Ms. Matthews reported that the underground work to establish the permanent power connection has begun. Councilmember Barry had expressed concern about the pace of the roofing. I discussed this with the contractor. Because of the interlocking system, the contractor must get one part done before beginning the next part.

We held the walk through for four contractors last week, who expressed interest in the request

for proposals for the Community Plaza Level.

Mr. Seamens asked for more information about access to the Library and accessibility for strollers and wheelchairs, and also asked about the flood retaining wall around the Library.

Ms. Matthews said she will follow up with the contractor about the flood wall.

REGULAR MEETING

3. Resolution Establishing the Takoma Park Poet Laureate Program

Motion by Elrich; second by Austin-Lane.

The motion was adopted (VOTING FOR: Porter, Austin-Lane, Barry, Elrich, Mizeur, Seamens, Williams).

Resolution 2005-40 (Attached)

4. Resolution Proclaiming May 27, 2005 as Rachel Carson Day in Takoma Park

Motion by Austin-Lane; second by Williams.

Ms. Austin-Lane noted that the Committee on the Environment requested the addition of two whereas clauses. Ms. Austin-Lane described the additional clauses. There was no objection to adding them. She requested that adoption of the resolution be publicized and that an article be placed in the City Newsletter.

Diana Post, Rachel Carson Council, spoke in favor of the resolution.

The resolution was adopted (VOTING FOR: Porter, Austin-Lane, Barry, Elrich, Mizeur, Seamens, Williams).

Resolution 2005-41 (Attached)

BUDGET WORKSESSION

5. Friends of the Tool Library

Andrew Sommers, Richard Levine, John Salmen, and Faith Wheeler were present for the discussion.

Mr. Salman said an action plan for the Friends of the Tool Library has been developed. There is

overwhelming support for the concept, but the group has concerns about the operation and inventory of the Tool Library. The group would like to have interaction with the Recreation Department and the Library.

Mr. Sommers spoke about the social value of the Tool Library. Projects like this affect the health of communities and individuals in the communities. These organizations are critical to the social fabric. People develop ties in the community. When considering extending the life of the Tool Library, we should think about the social benefits it provides. It is an institution worth supporting.

Richard Levine spoke about plans for making the Tool Library viable, including making it function more like a library, soliciting donations, improving the inventory. He suggested it provide information on how to use tools. The Tool Library could work with the City Library to have information on home improvement projects, videos. The Recreation Department could offer classes. He also suggested more visibility for the Tool Library, with information in the City Newsletter and on the web site.

Mr. Salmen suggested that people who have home repair projects that need done could borrow the tools from the Tool Library and work with CASA to hire laborers to do the work. Ideas like this can reinforce the use of the Tool Library and provide a service to the community. He also recommended that there be associate memberships in the Tool Library, for those who are not residents of Takoma Park.

Faith Wheeler, ANC 4B representative, said there is interest on the DC side. Two of the five board members are from DC.

Mr. Elrich suggested exploring the idea of our cable channel making some how-to videos or researching to see if this has been done elsewhere so that the City could run their programs. Additionally, volunteers could research and collect how to information for the City Library, but we can't create more work for the current City Library staff.

Mr. Barry said the group presented a thoughtful proposal, but Council asked for a marketing plan with numbers, usage information by area and economic group.

Ms. Austin-Lane said she appreciates the partnership the group has formed with DC. She supported a fee for non-residents.

Ms. Wheeler said a \$25 fee would not be an impediment. Fifty to 70 people from surrounding communities have expressed interest.

Mr. Seamens said he is glad to see DC represented here. I was very supportive of continuing the Tool Library. I am concerned that we haven't seen more progress over this past year. The vast majority in the budget is for staffing of the tool library. Have you discussed volunteer staffing?

Mr. Salmen said the interface is important. People need an improved quality of experience. Connecting with the City Library would help with circulation by having a system for checkout of items and tracking down those who do not return them.

In response to a question from Mr. Seamens, Mr. Lott said that the Public Works Department is prepared to absorb the current Tool Library employee if Council decides he is not longer needed at the Tool Library.

Ms. Porter said she is willing to support the Tool Library for another year, if the City can forge a partnership with the Friends of the Tool Library so that the group can help supplement what the City does. I think we will need volunteer assistance to do research and identify funding. Putting information on the web would help to generate interest.

Mr. Williams said the Friends of the Tool Library proposal is more exciting than anything we've heard about the Tool Library for a long time. This discussion is much more viable and expansive.

Mr. Elrich suggested putting a sign at the City Library. Mr. Seamens said if Council agrees to fund the Tool Library for another year, the first this the Friends should do is think about proposing signs to Council. We need something bigger on Ritchie Avenue and directional signs.

Ms. Porter said she appreciates the Friends work. As a practical matter, we probably can't accomplish everything in the first year. I don't see us moving the Tool Library this year. Continuation of the \$14,000 funding to pay the tool librarian would give the Friends time to follow up.

Mr. Barry said he would cast a symbolic no vote toward the proposal. We can't afford to fund good ideas without results.

Ms. Mizeur said she agrees in part with Councilmember Barry, but she would like to see it move forward. She asked that the Friends of the Tool Library provide an organizing piece every two months to let Council know what they are doing. We want to do more to partner with you. If we are having this same conversation next year, you will lose support.

6. Housing and Community Development - Follow Up Information on Rental Licensing

Ms. Matthews summarized the proposal to transfer the rental licensing program to Montgomery County. There are a number of employees involved in the licensing; we would not be able to eliminate or scale back positions. The County does not have a commercial occupancy license program. We have not been able to implement commercial licensing because of the current workload of staff. With the current workload, I'm not sure we can get the program up and running in FY06. It will be challenging. Transferring rental housing licensing to Montgomery County and implementation of a commercial licensing program would create a net increase to budget of about \$15,000.

Mr. Elrich said the numbers are confusing. He asked why can't we transfer the rental licensing function, but retain staff to do the other things. We need to do some of these things anyway. The fees of commercial inspections should cover the costs. This should have a zero impact on the budget or a net gain to the city.

Ms. Daines said if you were to follow through, we would remove rental licensing from the Code, and then the County would license under their program. They would charge a fee for licensing and inspections. For the commercial occupancy licensing, we had costed it out to cover 100% of the cost. There was a Council decision to drop the fee to a lower level, to result in the 40,000. The rental licensing program doesn't quite pay for itself. If we increase the licensing fee, the decision was made that it should not be an income generator. There was concern about how cost would be passed on.

Ms. Porter commented that some of the functions wouldn't go to the County. We would lose all the revenues, but not all of the cost.

Ms. Matthews said there are many staff members involved in the rental licensing, but not a significant part of any of them to be able to reduce staffing levels. We would keep the landlord certification program.

Ms. Daines said we would recommend moving some items to the Landlord Tenant Code. The County will not call to be sure COLTA orders have been addressed, that the annual rent report has been filed, or that the landlord has been certified. We could move these into the Landlord Tenant and Rent Stabilization Ordinances. It would be difficult to do those things and not have control over the licensing program.

Ms. Porter commented that revenues offset the other things we do. If we transferred to the County, we would be in a net negative.

Ms. Matthews said an issue for Council to decide is if the current level of code enforcement is sufficient. With this program, although it would be a net financial loss, we could do more proactive code enforcement.

Mr. Barry asked for information on the number of code enforcement complaints and how many staff hours are involved.

Mr. Williams asked if the \$40,000 for commercial inspections is included in the proposed budget.

Ms. Matthews responded that it is.

Ms. Austin-Lane said she appreciates seeing the numbers on this. It gives me answers to questions I've raised.

BREAK

Council recessed for a scheduled break at 9:40 p.m. and reconvened at 9:55 p.m.

7. Library

Ms. Matthews provided highlights of the Library budget.

Ms. Arnold-Robbins noted that the most significant change will be the Library's involvement with the Community Learning Center. The Library will play an administrative role over the two computer rooms. We're looking forward to completion of the center. It will help to restore some of the activity we've lost during the construction.

Ms. Arnold-Robbins commented on alternatives to be explored as proposed in the TASDI report: 1) transforming the Library into a more specialized facility, such as a children's library; and 2) more substantial fundraising by the Friends of the Library. She described how the Friends operate now and the funds they have raised in the past. Some activities more intended to promote the Library than to raise funds. Ms. Arnold-Robbins said that children use the Library during a variety of hours, not just after school. They don't just use children's books.

Ms. Austin-Lane said that the TASDI report suggests that our library should have special things that a County library wouldn't have. Historic Takoma would be a group to work with to think about what our collection should be. As to the general collection, I am concerned that we can't benefit from circulation in the Montgomery County library system. I feel challenged to better understand that component. Why couldn't the County system bring their vans around to our library and help circulation that way? I have not seen anything in writing from the County that they wouldn't keep the library if we were to turn it over to them.

Ms. Arnold-Robbins described a report that suggested it wouldn't be a good idea to turn the Library over to the County. Their formula for the proximity of libraries to one another would leave no rationale for keeping the library open.

In response to a question from Mr. Seamens about the size of the Library, Ms. Arnold-Robbins said we are using space that we have. We will be able to accommodate more people on computer workstations with the new center.

Ms. Austin-Lane asked about the Film Festival.

Ms. Arnold-Robbins said a lot of effort has gone into the project, on the part of people who are not film professionals (such as from the Cable office, the Library, Columbia Union College). We seem to fall short in the area of promotion. There are wonderful films out there. Hiring a director, with more expertise, has been suggested by Councilmember Austin-Lane. Some people involved are actively involved in films. The addition of a director would help a lot.

8. Preliminary Budget Reconciliation

Mr. Williams suggested 1) reducing the salt dome expenditure by \$20,000, since the bids came in lower than expected; 2) changing the tax rebate percentage from 30% to 50 %; and 3) moving \$2000 from the Taste of Takoma festival to the Film Festival director.

Mr. Elrich said he would like the budget to reflect the number of police officers we have, instead of the 41 officers authorized. Reduce the number by two for this year, unless there are individuals in training or in the pipeline.

Mr. Barry requested information on overtime being paid to police officers because of a shortage of officers due to injuries and because we don't have enough officers.

Mr. Seamens commented on his frustration with the budget process. He said he hoped we could deal with exploring sending the dispatchers to the County, the citizen survey, and a five-year plan. I have concern about low income residents of the city. I see some areas where there might be savings, in the vehicle bay for the police department, and the number of officers. He requested more information about the vehicle bay. Mr. Seamens said he would like to hold a worksession about creating a language advisory committee to find ways to open up government to the community. We need to allocate some money to implement ideas they bring forward. I would like to put \$5000 in the budget for implementation of the committee. The City Charter could be translated for that amount, for example. There are 2,500 households in the city with incomes less than \$25000. It is extremely challenging to live here. I would like to add \$10,000 targeted for the Manna Food Center on an as-needed basis. Manna helps 200 Takoma Park households each month. We can expand this service to help more Takoma Park residents. Finally, past City policies have attracted low income people to live here. Add \$200,000 to create a City- administered subsidy program to assist those most in need, to be administered by the Housing Department.

Ms. Austin-Lane said she supports Councilmember Williams' ideas for tax relief and a Film Festival director (\$2000). She said she would like more information before supporting a reduction in the number of police positions. I would like to see sustained attention to patrols, around the Metro, year round. If we pay attention to our Metro area, we're doing the best thing we can for the city. This security issue makes residents nervous about walking, accessing the Metro, makes visitors hesitate to come here, and causes businesses to lose money. I would propose that with the examination of the Police Department, we think about a \$25,000 matching grant to help launch the CSAFE program around the Metro. Ms. Austin-Lane said she agrees with Mr. Seamens' suggestion of funding translation of permanent documents and funding for Manna.

Ms. Porter noted the voluntary contribution from the stormwater billing that is sent to Adventist Community Services. She said she agrees with the reduction in the salt dome amount and the increase in the property tax rebate. The rebate is losing effectiveness. We should lobby the State to be able to increase it further, or to be able to piggyback on what the County is doing.

Ms. Porter requested \$900 for the City to participate in the Street Smart program for FY06.

Mr. Barry requested funding for street lights in Ward 6, and repair and extension of the sidewalk on Erskine Avenue. On police, I would appreciate information on use of sick leave for the Police Department, which takes police off the street. Is it compatible with other agencies across the area. Is sick leave across the City comparable with other municipalities.

Ms. Porter said she would like to get the cost estimate to contract out road maintenance to Montgomery County.

Ms. Austin-Lane commented on communication problems with the street rehabilitation. She said she wants to know what steps we are taking to improve communication with residents. Do whatever it takes, communication specialists, training.

ADJOURN

The Council adjourned for the evening at 10:45 p.m.